

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 1BOSTON GLOBE
5 October 1985

FILE ONLY

Diplomat's background shielded by government

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In the lobby of the Visitors Center at the Lexington Battle Green

PROFILE IN THE NEWS

is a diorama built in 1966 depicting in miniature the historic skirmish between British troops and local militiamen in 1775. A plaque beneath the model bears the name of its designer, William F. Buckley.

Since his abduction outside a Beirut apartment building 18 months ago, William Buckley has been portrayed as the quiet American, a bachelor whose professional background in the Army and the Foreign Service has been largely shielded by the US government.

Yesterday, friends in the Boston area remembered Buckley as a serious, reserved and plain-spoken man who was guided by patriotism into a career in the government.

"He was a hell of a guy, a very much patriotic man," said Frank Langone of Winchester, who worked with Buckley at the Lexington Public Library in the early 1960s and corresponded with him until recently. "He never beat around the bush about anything. Everything with him was always yes or no."

Buckley, 57, was born in Medford and raised in Stoneham. At Stoneham High School he was vice president of his senior class, a member of the glee club and the school newspaper and a standout on the hockey team.

After graduating from Boston University with a degree in international relations in 1955, he worked as assistant director at both the Concord Free Library and the Lexington Public Library.

In 1965, Buckley joined the Army as a civilian employee. State Department officials declined to comment on Buckley's duties in the Army, saying only that he served in Vietnam and Washington and left the service with the rank of captain.

Officials said Buckley joined the Foreign Service in 1983 and in

July of that year received his first foreign posting, as first secretary of the political section at the US Embassy in Lebanon.

On the morning of March 16, 1984, Buckley was leaving his West Beirut apartment building for the embassy when his Honda was stopped by three armed men. The men forced Buckley into a waiting car and sped off. Although

responsibility for the kidnapping was not initially claimed by any group, Buckley's name later appeared in a list of Western hostages published by the Islamic Jihad, an underground terrorist group.

At the time of the kidnapping, embassy officials described Buckley's duties as typical of a political officer. "He was in contact with various political elements in this

society to ascertain what was happening and to report it," said Robert Pugh, then deputy chief of the US mission in Beirut.

Of six Americans kidnapped and believed held in Beirut, Buckley has been in captivity the longest.

Friends said Buckley has two sisters living in the Boston area who have requested that their names not be released. However, a State Department official, Michael

Austrian, said yesterday, "He has no close family that we've heard from so far."

Town officials in Stoneham said they planned to distribute yellow ribbons to local residents and businesses tomorrow in Buckley's name.

"We're doing it in support, hopefully not in memorium," said the town clerk, Annamæ Arsenault.